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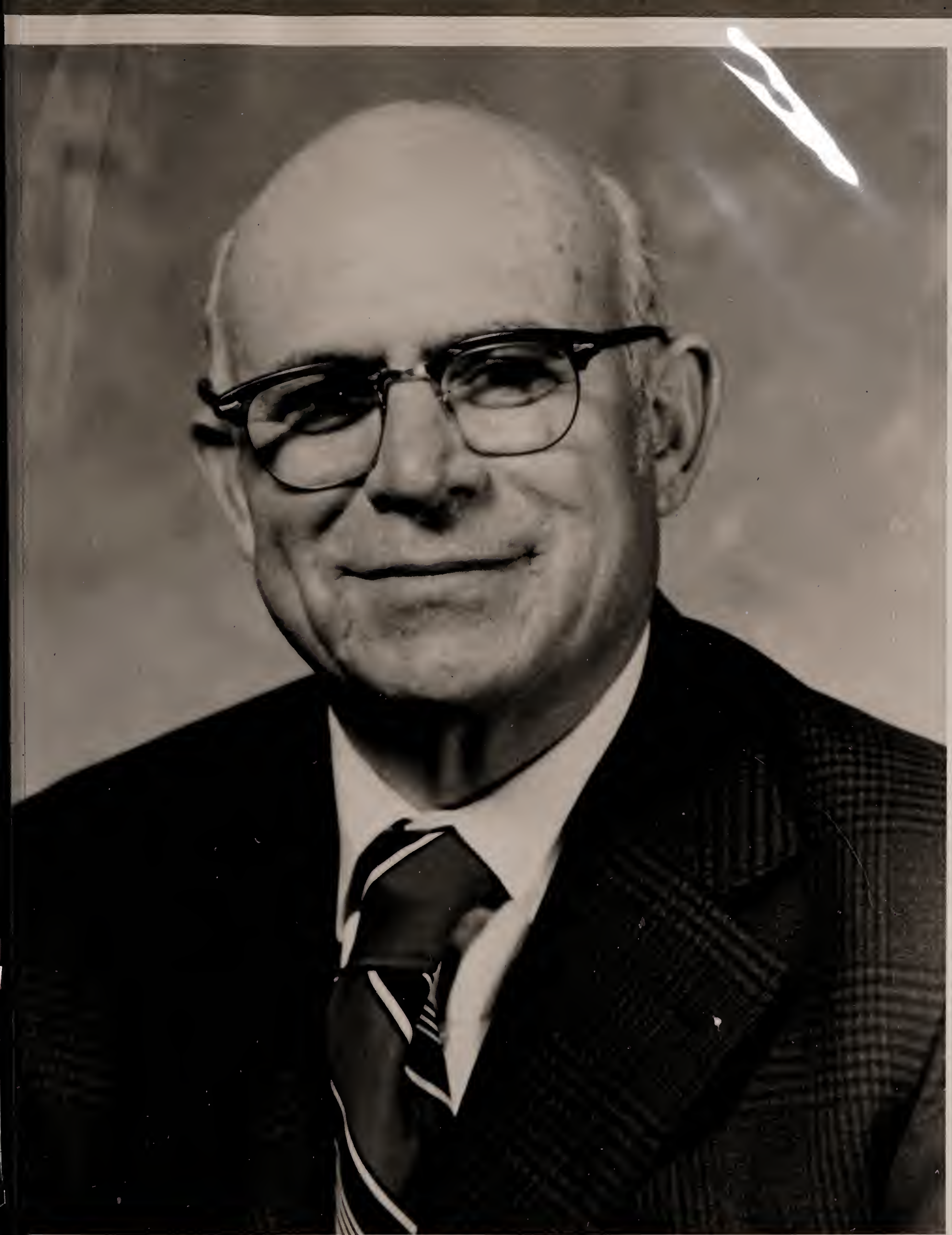
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

MR. ORMAN HARRISON

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Interviewers

Marcia Worth
(signature)

(signature)

(signature)

Feb. 25, 1975
(date)

Interviewee

A. C. Harrison
(signature)

P.O. Box 235
(address)

Lockport Ill
(city & state)

Feb. 26, 1975
(date)

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NORTH: This is an interview with my uncle Orman Harrison for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Project, by Marcia North, at my home in Lockport on February 26, 1975, at 2:00 p.m.

NORTH: The first question I want to ask is: When did you first come to Lockport -- about what year?

HARRISON: May of 1922.

NORTH: What do you remember about this town when you first came?

HARRISON: Well, when I first came, Marcia, 1921, they had paved the first pavement in Lockport -- it was up on the hill around the high school from Ninth Street, Hamilton Street, Washington Street and Madison -- those were all blacktop. When I moved to Lockport, State Street was still gravel; and it was full of big chuckholes. As my pastime as a youngster, for a month or two I stayed in Lockport until I went back to Mattoon where I came from originally, was to watch them blacktop and pave the State Street. That was in about 1922. The streetcars were still in effect then. They ran from Rockdale to Lockport.

NORTH: What in particular stands out in your mind about the town?

HARRISON: Well, at that time we had beautiful elm trees up around the school. I came from a large, beautiful town of Mattoon, much larger than Lockport was at the time; and we were disappointed with State Street until we got near the high school, up around Washington Street and Madison Street -- along in there. The beautiful trees reached across the street and formed an archway. And at that time I think all the bridal wreath in town was in bloom; and it was very, very beautiful.

NORTH: In your opinion what are the changes in Lockport since you came, compared to today?

HARRISON: Mostly in growth in population. When I was in high school -- when your uncle and I graduated from high school as the Class of '26, why we had the largest class at that time -- Forty-four, that was the biggest class. I can remember distinctly our superintendent, Mr. Lockhart, telling us if anybody should ask someone how many youngsters we had in school, say around 200; we had around 195 youngsters in school. Like I say, I think it was 43 or 44 only graduated; and you know better than I do how many you have in your graduation classes now. Of course, at that time, we only had one school. I think it was 39. . . no, it was more when I graduated. They put on the first addition along Twelfth Street, and then I think in the summer of '29 D. A. Swenson built the big gymnasium. Those were the first two additions for the school. I remember I carried a petition to put it before the voters. I was criticized greatly by some people because I wasn't a taxpayer. I /Laughter/ carried the petition. Then, of course, at that time we had stores all over town. I worked for Mr. R. B. Walters at the corner of Ninth and State Street, and I delivered groceries every Saturday over to the high school with a horse and wagon. Now a horse and wagon would look mighty funny going down State Street. /Laughter/ I had a horse and wagon. Even at that time they used to unload steer over on the Sante Fe track, and drive the steers up Ninth Street over the C. & A. tracks, up over State Street, and out past your grandfather's old place up on Ninth Street out onto Homer. They might drive 25 or 50 head of steer up the road. Would you like to see that now?

NORTH: /Laughter/ It would be different.

HARRISON: Cowboys and everything -- just like downtown -- just like out west. Of course, the traffic and everything has increased so much. I can speak more about the fire department. Many years ago they had horses and wagons, and to my understanding were stabled where Gombosy's Radio Shop is on Ninth Street. Later on it was Lockport Realty, and then Jerry Highland had his plumbing shop -- now it's Gombosy's Radio Shop. Many years ago that's where the horses were kept. Then they moved down to Adelman's Building, and we had an old International truck with a sliding radiator and hard rubber tires on it. They had that until 1930-1931. When I joined the fire department, we had one Studebaker pump truck and one real tank truck in the state of Illinois. It originated here in Lockport. That was for going out of the township, like going out to your place now, where there wouldn't be any water. Why, you carried your own water, like we do now with our present system with our big tankers. We thought we were doing something when we had 500 gallons of water; now we carry 2500 if your house would catch on fire. I saw our fire department go from a no-paid men in the W.P.A. era. We built the city hall down on State Street; and part of it, of course, was the fire department. The Lockport volunteers had several thousand dollars in that building. They bought the lot, and the city built the rest of it. We had two paid men, Chief William Clark and George . In 1956 we had a referendum, and in 1959 we built our first station on Route 7. At the present time we have thirty personnel besides our volunteers. When I entered high school, all athletes that played football and baseball were in the habit of playing at Dellwood Park. We had to run from school out to the park every night for practice. The athletic field, as we have it today, was just purchased. It was in the spring of 1923 that we had our first baseball game out there. Of course, in the fall of 1923 the football sea-

son opened. Of course, at that time when we run out to the athletic field, we thought we were miles away from home because there was only one home in between the high school and the field; that was Wyatt's house out there. That was the last house out there, and the other houses have been built up. I'm speaking of Twelfth Street; Wyatts live on Twelfth and Lincoln, I think. From that point on there wasn't any houses. Calvin Grove wasn't built up. There wasn't a house; it was all woods. The Milnes were farming the property. Later on after Calvin Grove was built, the Congregational Church was built out there; that was all new. There wasn't any business at all on Ninth Street. Like I told you, when I was instrumental in building the fire station out there at Route 7, several businessmen complained, "Why should we build the fire station so far out of town?" It shows now that we used good judgment, because we have more taxable property out on the two shopping centers than we have on State Street. All your business from now on in appears to be headed that way. Of course, at that time, too, when we used to have a fire over on the other side of the canal -- on the side of the Sanitary District -- many times our fire trucks were stopped by bridges that were turned, or the bridge would be out-of-order and need repair. So this high-level bridge that we have in Lockport is a boom to the fire protection for our township because we can put a truck over on either side of the township in a matter of four or five minutes. I think I told you before when we started this interview, Marcia, I worked myself through high school by peddling groceries for R. B. Walters' Store, which was on the corner of Ninth and State Streets, which is now the Cornolos' Store. R. B. Walters was the son of Mike Walters, and the Mike Walters family had the whole block up between Fifth and Fourth, between Washington and Jefferson Street. That

was the Mike Walters property where Doctor Viskocil's home is now and the Viscovis and Frank Vaser -- they call it now; but that was the original Mike Walters home. Of course, several descendants of old Mike Walters is still around town. Somehow or another the Mike Walters family and your family, the Norths, are related somehow or another. It has to be explained to me, but I know you are through the Hawley family. Michael Walters' first wife was a Hawley. Your father's mother -- her great-grandfather . . . your grandfather's mother was a Hawley, so that makes you related to the Walters family, plus Clayton A. Pitts who died recently; his mother was a Hawley. So I must be careful what I say while I'm talking about some relation around here. /Laughter/ Because we're all related! Of course, I'm only related to you by marriage. Your father can tell you the rest of it.

NORTH: Could you tell us something about the old buildings in Lockport and some of the old industries?

HARRISON: Well, Marcia, some of this is hearsay because I'm going back through history. One time on the south end of Illinois and Illinois Steel Company, there's an old building still standing there. To my understanding that was a paper mill. Then around Sixteenth Street, by Sixteenth Street river bridge, to my understanding there was a brick kiln in there of some sort; but that's only hearsay. I can't verify that. Across from the Thirteenth Street station, to my understanding, is where they repaired boats and volunteer canal commissioners or something like that. Then we saw the railroad change three hands when we came to town and when I was working -- started to work out of high school. That was the Chicago & Alton. Then it became the B. & O. Now it's the G. M. & O. I saw the railroad go through three different hands. Something happened to Lockport

many years ago that very few people know. You know we had the Santa Fe going through Lockport; and somehow or another Herbert Hoover, former president of our country, got off of the train coming from Chicago and went back to Chicago on the other. /Laughter/ Very few people of Lockport know it, but Mr. Hoover shook hands with all the fellows in the station that recognized him. That didn't make the papers because nobody knew that it did happen. Talking about old buildings -- while I was in high school, the Will County Printing Company was in an old building on Ninth Street that belonged to the North family; and later on they built the building there on the corner of Ninth and Hamilton where the locker plant is located now. Originally, that was the Will County Printing Office. In the old place which your grandfather owned, that's where the printing company was; an old gentleman by the name of Mr. Deeley was a bookkeeper for them. The Cheadle family owned the business; but Mr. Deeley was the bookkeeper, and he just happened to be the last living charter member of our Masonic Lodge in Lockport. At that time the Knights of Columbus were meeting upstairs; and the printing office needed the whole business, so Father North (your grandfather) gave them the whole building, and the K.C.'s had to look elsewhere for a meeting place. They moved across the street; and at that time there were at least three bodies, three fraternities, meeting in the building that was known as the K. of P. Building over where the Terrace Liquor Store is now. Upstairs there, the K.C.'s met and the K. of P.'s met in the same lodge with the auxiliaries. I don't know whether the auxiliaries or the K. of P.'s or K. C.'s, but there were also the Rebecca's up there. At that time the Goodales had three stores along there. The grandfather of the president (Goodale) who runs the funeral home, his grandfather had a furniture store where the liquor

store is now; and next to this was the taxing body that was part of the furniture business. Where the Philbin's Paint Store is, that was a funeral parlor, a funeral home. Of course, at that time most of your funerals were held from the house. We didn't have such things as funeral homes. In 1929 I was in the trucking business, and I moved the present Mr. Goodale's father. I moved him from the Ninth Street location to his present place in 1929. He's been going to town ever since. Getting back to the printing office, the printing office, as I say, built the brick building there on Ninth and Hamilton. Later on they moved up in part of the old Barrel's Lock Building -- built an addition onto that. Getting back to Barrel's Lock, Barrel's lock was sold all over the country around 1930 and moved to Waukegan and North Chicago. Barrel's Lock wasn't noted for high wages and what-not, but it provided a lot of work for a lot of people in Lockport and was quite a trade. A lot of men learned their locksmithing trade there and some machinist trade there. So when they moved out of Lockport, it hurt us. To this day you'll see Barrel's locks on old houses -- it was a great lock. It helped put our little city on the map. Of course, around about that time the Texas Company -- I think it was 1914 or 1915 that the Texas Company came to town. They call it Texaco now, but at that time it was the Texas Company; and it has since changed their name to the Texaco Company. They've grown by leaps and bounds. I don't know the output of Texaco now, but Texaco of Lockport Works is noted for its pollution plant. They've spent several million dollars building it to conform with all the standards now. One of the modern units in the country is here in Lockport -- our own Texaco! Of course, I'm prejudiced being a retiree from Texaco.

NORTH: What were some of the big fires that you attended?

HARRISON: One outstanding fire that I remember would be of interest to many people of Lockport was in St. Dennis'. It caught fire in the spring of 1946. The people of the parish had redecorated their basement and spent quite a sum of money on it. The painters, as I remember, left paint and oily rags at the bottom of the stairwell; and this ignited and spread throughout the building. The building was a lesson in good firemanship; because if the building people had obeyed the first fireman that came on the job and had kept the doors and windows closed, it wouldn't have spread. But to save their newly-decorated basement, they insisted on opening the windows and doors; and that gave the fire draft, and it spread. It was quite a fire -- I was there -- and as I said, it was a good lesson on how to fight a fire. The Lockport volunteers -- it was strictly volunteers at that time -- that was 10 years before we formed our district -- we put out the fire without any help from -- without any outside help at all, which was really a good job. Another fire I remember was the Bentley fire, when Harold Rowe and Franklin Bentley had a butcher shop at the corner of Ninth and State Streets. Formerly it had been the Yost Brothers' Building -- now it's the First Savings and Loan Building. One night, early in the morning, we had quite a fire there. To prove that I was there, you can go out to the fire station and see your uncle Warren North and I on ladders fighting that fire -- both of us were there. But anyhow, as I remember, there was a gas explosion underneath the sidewalk in front of the store -- it was a solid mass of flames. Again, our volunteers did a wonderful job of saving it. O'Briens, I think it was, had a store next door to us -- it is a parking lot now. The Home & Loan Company were worried about their books and things, because we had the ladder up on top of their building shooting water down on the fire. One of the O'Briens went across to Mr. Jerry Highland, who had his plumbing shop

across the road, and asked if they could put some of their books and stuff in there. Jerry was supposed to have answered, "Where in the hell do you think I'm going?", because Lockport was plenty worried about the place. We only had two trucks, and it was definitely a job for the volunteers; and the volunteers licked it and put it out. Then, of course, there's been fires at Texaco; but we've been fortunate over the years in Lockport -- we haven't had too many disastrous fires. I think it was in 1932 or 1933 that lightening struck a tank in Texaco, and we fought that fire all night long. At 7:00 in the morning the fire went over the fire banks; and we lost a thousand feet of hose at the fire, which Texaco later reimbursed us for. Again, that was definitely all volunteers. One thing used to be so much fun (after it was all over -- going to fires). At this time prohibition was going on, and many of our citizens were having stills and home brew in their basement. These stills would blow up, and we'd go across the township to put out these fires and come to find out, in so many instances, that's where the fires were started because the still blew up. As I say, we were in quite a fix because we only had 500 gallons of water. Like I said before, we had the first tank truck in the state of Illinois.

NORTH: Would you like to conclude this interview with bits and pieces of Lockport history?

HARRISON: Years ago in the twenties and early thirties Lockport had a bad reputation. Instead of having a squad car, we had a policeman on a motorcycle, and he used to land late by the old library on Eighth Street or Tenth Street and pick up people going a few miles over the speed limit through town. Lockport was known far and wide as a speed trap.

In fact, it was written up in the Chicago papers. At that time the city hall. . . The police station was an old stone building on Tenth Street where the modern Moose Building is now located. It was an old, delapidated building that lasted until around 1935 when W.P.A. came into effect. The Moose Building was built with donations from various citizens around town who donated \$100 to the building of this fund. The city of Lockport had to raise so much money, and it was raised by this private donation plus the money from the Lockport Volunteer Fire Department. Some place or else around town -- I don't know where it is -- it used to hang in the new City Building, a plaque with everybody's name on it. What happened to it, I don't know. Another thing we might add, Marcia, on Tenth and Hamilton Streets, kiddy-corner from where your great-grandparents used to live (the old Paulson home), was a place called Pilgrim Hall. It originally, to my understanding, was the Baptist Church. Then later on the Baptists sold it to a Congregationalist who used it for a Sunday School. The place was a Sunday School for many years. Now, of course, we know that when the church was built on Ninth Street, why they did away with it; and they sold that building to a private individual who turned it into a store building -- rental property. I'm sorry, Sweetheart, but that's about all I know.

NORTH: It's been very interesting, and thank you for coming.

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